DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 279 CG 016 012

AUTHOR	Tanenbaum, Marc H.; And Others
TITLE	[White House Conference on Aging, 1981. Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Media. Report and Executive Summary of the Technical Committee.]
INSTITUTION	White House Conference on Aging, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	TCES-16; TCR-16
PUB DATE	81
NOTE	40p.; Paper presented at the White House Conference on Aging (3rd, Washington, DC, November 30-December 3, 1981). For related documents, see CG 015 980-987 and CG 015 990-CG 016 022.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Age Discrimination; *Aging (Individuals); Cable Television; *Mass Media; *Media Research; *Older Adults; Programing (Broadcast); Stereotypes; *Television; Television Commercials; Videodisc Recordings; Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS	*White House Conference on Aging

ABSTRACT

The relationship of older Americans to the new media culture of society is the focus of this Technical Committee Report. The work of two committee-appointed subcommittees on stereotypes and new media technology are explained with a special emphasis on the influence of television. Age stereotyping is examined in prime time television, daytime television serials, and television commercials as well as in print magazine advertising and children's literature. Age discrimination in employment is mentioned in relationship to the underrepresentation of older persons in televised programming and commercials. Key issues related to the media's portrayal of older persons are identified and recommendations are made. The new technology section of this report considers the potential uses of videotape recorders, video discs, cable television, interactive cable, and cable and computer technology. Advantages of this new technology are discussed, problems are addressed, and key issues and recommendations are listed. This report concludes that new media technology presents the potential for more programming directed toward the needs of older Americans in entertainment, news and information, and offers the potential for innovative services to help solve the problems of older Americans. An executive summary of this report is also included. (NRB)

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WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING, 1981

Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Media

Report and Executive Summary of the Technical Committee

Marc H. Tanenbaum, D.D., Director
National Interreligious Affairs
American Jewish Committee

Lydia Bragger
Bertha Brown
Nancy Hanks
Kathleen Hall Jamieson
Jules Power
Nancy K. Schlossberg
Jackie Sunderland

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CG 016012

Papers presented at the White House Conference on Aging, Washington, DC, November 30 - December 3, 1981.

the 1981
White House
Conference
on
Aging

Report of
Technical Committee
on

CREATING AN AGE INTEGRATED SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

TCR-16

NOTE: The recommendations of this document are not recommendations of the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, or the Department of Health and Human Services. This document was prepared for the consideration of the Conference delegates. The delegates will develop their recommendations through the processes of their national meeting in late 1981.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, D.D., Director
National Interreligious Affairs
American Jewish Committee

Lydia Bragger, Chairperson
Gray Panther National Media Watch
Task Force

Bertha Brown, MA, Executive Director
Our Neighborhood Civic Association &
School - Community Program
Philadelphia, PA

Nancy Hanks, A.B.
Former Chairperson of the National
Endowment for the Arts
Former Chairperson of the National
Council on the Arts
Active board member at Duke
University/Center on Aging

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Art
University of Maryland

Jules Power, Senior Producer
Overeasy, Public Broadcasting
Service

Nancy K. Schlossberg, Ed.D.
Expert - Midlife Transition
and Counteracting Stereotypes

Jackie Sunderland, Director
National Center on Arts and
Aging
National Council on Aging

COMMITTEE STAFF, CONSULTANTS, EXPERTS

Morton Yarmon, Consultant
Director, Public Relations
American Jewish Committee, NYC

Marlene L. Johnson
White House Conference on Aging Staff

Stan Cooper
White House Conference on Aging Staff

INTRODUCTION

The relationship of the older American to the new media culture of our society--as subject, participant, and consumer--is one of the central, critical issues confronting the 1981 White House Conference on Aging.

Mass media have become "the heart of the folk culture of America on which ordinary people everywhere lean " (Boorstin, 1974). On an average evening, an estimated 90 million Americans watch television as their primary medium for information and entertainment. In this country, over 98 percent of all homes have television sets and Americans--expecially the very young, the old and the poor--tune in to about six hours a day or approximately 2,200 hours a year. Older persons are the primary consumers of television. A national survey found that the typical older adult consumes approximately four to seven more hours of television each week than does the average viewer (Marron, 1980).

"We are perhaps the first people in history," Boorstin observers, "to have centrally organized, mass-produced folk culture." That popular culture comes to us from enormous, centralized, self-consciously creative organizations of advertising agencies, newspapers, radio and TV networks, outdoor advertising agencies, large circulation magazines, a profusion of hardcover and paperback books, and so on.

These media--in particular, advertising, television programming and the exploding new media technologies--play and will play a decisive role informing and establishing the values, the ideals, the needs, the cultural heroes and anti-heroes, and the images that Americans in all segments, racial, religious, ethnic, and gender groups hold about one another.

The U.S. Congress clearly recognized the dangers of age stereotypes which it sees as "prevalent throughout the nation." In enabling legislation for the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, Congress mandated that a policy be developed to overcome such stereotypes. (P.L. 95-478)

Toward that end a technical committee was established to explore personal and societal implications for the media in an intergenerational context. Media and aging was one of seven areas examined under the rubric "Creating an Age-Integrated Society," a conception that implies both short- and long-term perspectives.

The Technical Committee on Mass Media convened four all-day sessions between July, 1980 and January, 1981. Two subcommittees were formed and charged with preparing background information for the committee's deliberations, which centered on these major themes:

- the influence of the mass media in forming and perpetuating cultural values and role models;

- the influence of the media in changing society's values by fostering constructive relationships between older persons and other age groups;

- the role of older people as consumers of the media;

- the role of older persons as participants in producing the educational and information programming and entertainment content in the media;

- and the impact of new media technologies on the lives of older persons.

In seeking to analyze society's perception about older persons, the committee directed the Subcommittee on Sterotypes to conduct a survey of existing literature on the portrayal of older persons in the mass media. The resulting background paper, "Stereotyping of the Elderly in the Mass Media: A Review of the Literature," by Kathleen Jamieson and Theresa Marron was the centerpiece of the committee's exploration of the implications for a national policy to eliminate age stereotypes. The committee's analysis of the state of the art also was based on a report by Lydia Bragger entitled "Age Stereotyping and the Media" and a search of gerontology journals by Jacqueline Sunderland.

The committee examined the image of older Americans in the mass media as indicated by the survey and identified several areas that have been largely overlooked--radio, song lyrics, television game shows, news coverage, children's cartoons, documentaries, newspapers and so on. A cadre of media executives* representing

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*John Canon, President, National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

Dr. Gary Jordan, Warner Amex Cable Communications

Rosalind I. Liberman, Corporate Support Associate, Equitable Life Assurance

Alfred Plant, Treasurer, National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

Herbert Schlosser, Radio Corporation of America (RCA)

James Sheffield, Population Resource Center

Harry Shooshan, Former Chief, House Commerce Communications Subcommittee

Gene Swanzy, Public Broadcasting Service

Nicholas VanDyck, National Council for Children and Television

Beverly Vinson, Director of Programming, Public Broadcasting System

television, print, advertising, marketing and research met with the committee to examine the role of mass media in establishing constructive images of older persons and understanding the needs of the aging population of this country. The portrayal of older women and the minority aged, who are underrepresented in most forms of media portrayal, received special attention as the committee discussed what the media could do to help change society's negative attitudes toward aging.

The Subcommittee on New Media Technology prepared a brief background paper entitled "Cable Television Programs for Older Adults" (Marron, 1980). Subsequently, experts on new media technology were called in to present to the committee up-to-date information on the telecommunications industry.

The committee invested considerable time examining the issues of aging as they pertain to the electronic media, because television is a fixture in most American homes and its impact is pervasive.

MEDIA AND AGING

"Negative attitudes toward old age and the old, which probably have existed in most societies, became exacerbated in our own society during the transformation from a frontier to an urban, technological economy which placed its highest value on productive efficiency and fostered obsolescence of both machines and men," according to Tibbits (The Gerontologist, 1979).

The mass media play a preeminent role in this society and some aging advocates blame the media for the widespread prejudice against older persons and for the public's negative views about aging. The media have "portrayed old people as ugly, decrepit, stupid, forgetful, toothless, sexless and ready to fall on the conveyor belt of life after 65" (Bragger, 1980). It is almost impossible to avoid print or broadcast media on a daily basis and many of the stereotypes of older persons are found in the television programs we watch and the books and magazines we read. Bragger (1980) states that while all forms of mass media are guilty of stereotyping of the old, television is particularly adept at imposing stereotypes because it visually reinforces its message on an audience unsurpassed in size by any other medium. "Televison legitimizes ideas," Bragger reports. The result is that older persons, as well as those in other age groups, get daily messages that there is something inherently wrong with being old.

"Television is not merely entertainment, it shapes our perceptions of reality and defines for us who and what is good and bad" (Marks, 1979). Consequently, those in charge of the media bear a tremendous social responsibility. The mass media, especially television, have the potential to alter the negative stereotypes of older persons by providing information about the aging process and various role models demonstrating successful ways of dealing with growing older.

"We would like to see television explore on a regular basis the satisfaction of life after 60, showing life, intelligence, fruitful work, love and sex" (Bragger, 1980).

"We need some realistic alternative visions of older people and their style of life. Something between the cantankerous, constipated, sickly, sterile, stupid, forgetful image and the all too-perfect, ever-helpful, all-knowing, gracious and kindly image" (Mark, 1979).

Recognizing television's central role in the lives of Americans, including older adults, many researchers advocate the use of television, especially cable TV, to disseminate essential information, facilitate the delivery of social services, and reduce isolation among older persons. Kubey (1980) notes that while it is popular to criticize television because "its presence and impact are so pervasive... television can be praised for its effective conveyance of information and its unique suitability to the aged's life style." Cable is particularly suited to these tasks since it is community oriented and permits programming which addresses a specific message to a specified audience, such as older persons. The nation is in the midst of an explosion of new media technology that could have a positive impact on the lives of older adults. (See section on New Technology).

AGE STEREOTYPING AND MEDIA

Prime Time

Approximately 90 million people watch television each evening. Three out of four television viewers surveyed (NCOA-Harris, 1975) indicated that "on the whole, television programs show young people, not older people."

In their 1980 report to the House Select Committee on Aging, Gerbner, et al., note that (1) the underrepresentation of both the young and the old has been consistent over a 10-year period; and (2) the characterizations of older persons is predominantly negative. The data contained in the Gerbner report are based on the analysis of an ongoing research project which examines the content and effects of prime time network television programming. The data base included over 1,300 programs and 16,600 characters drawn from periodic samples of prime time dramatic programming broadcast on the three major networks over the decade from 1968-1978. Trained coders categorized the sex, race, class, age, and type of role (major or minor) for all characters.

Gerbner et al. suggested that the age distribution found on television is more reflective of the advertising industry's preoccupation with the prime demographic market aged 18-49, than the actual population. For example, in a sample week in 1977, only two percent of the major characters were older.

Gerbner also found that in prime time:

- older men outnumber older women three to one;
- proportionately fewer older characters are 'good' while the proportion of 'bad' older characters, especially men, is larger than in the younger age groups;
- when the success of characters is measured, more older women are unsuccessful than successful;
- when women are involved in violence they are more likely than men to be victims and as they get older, their relative risk of being hurt of killed rises even further;
- women have less power at any age and are most likely to become victims rather than victors as they get older;
- male and female minority characters are less likely than non-minority characters to appear;
- when minority characters do appear they are likely to be found in situational comedies.

Since the number of minority characters regardless of age is comparatively small, it is difficult to make statistically significant claims about minority characters in a single age group (Jamieson, 1980). The U.S. Civil Rights Commission reported that, of the major characters in televised drama from 1975-1977, 3.6 percent of the minority females and only 2.7 percent of the minority males were over 60. Gerbner (1980) suggests that when minority characters do appear they are much more likely to be in their twenties if they are female or their thirties if they are male rather than in their fifties, sixties of seventies.

Finally, Jantz and Seefeldt et al., (1978) analyzed a random sample of prime time and Saturday morning television programming on the three major networks over a ten-week period. The sample consisted of 65 half-hour prime time segments and 20 half-hour segments of Saturday morning programming. A total of 59 older characters--51 men and 8 women--were identified. Ninety-three percent (55) of the characters were white and six percent (4) were Black. Although over half of the older characters were portrayed as employed, there were no older Blacks or women employed,in high prestige occupations. Blacks or women employed in high prestige occupations. While ten Saturday morning segments included an older character, there were no older minoities,and women were underrepresented.

Daytime TV Serials

Unlike the older adults in prime time dramatic television, those on daytime serials generally are more emotionally stable and physically healthier than their younger counterparts (Barton and

Schreiber, 1976; Cassata, Anderson and Skill, 1980). Cassata et al. report that of the 365 characters observed in a small exploratory study of soap operas, 15.9 percent were judged to be adults 55 years or older. The overall physical appearance of the older adult was generally favorable; with only three exceptions, all were shown actively engaged in some meaningful employment.

These conclusions corroborate Barton's (1976) finding that daytime serials depict younger characters more negatively than older characters.

Depiction of Older Persons in Televised Commercials

After an "informal survey of forthcoming TV ad campaigns based on six recent issues of Broadcasting magazine," Nicholas Johnson (1978) concluded "that the advertising images of older persons are in many ways even more defeating that the program stereotypes themselves." His survey revealed that: "of 147 advertising firms, almost 60 percent were gearing their ads to those under 49; 24 percent were aiming at the total adult market; 10 percent had miscellaneous targets; only 6 percent were aiming for audiences 35 and older." What kinds of products are involved in this last example? We are all familiar with the denture-cleaning and laxatives ads. These firms are adding optical store, little liver pills, pantyhose and "tummy control" tops (all necessary preparation for gradual physical breakdown), life insurance (time to think about these things), and coin collections (must do something to keep busy).

Using three coders to maximize reliability, Jamieson and Marron (1978) analyzed televised commercials at various times during the year, segmenting characters into age categories--older, middle aged, young and child. A comparison of 90 ads analyzed the week of January 16 and 899 characters portrayed in 300 televised commercials in October 1978 revealed that:

- Young women appear more frequently in televised commercials than any other age group (25.9 percent of the characters) and older women appear least often (3.8 percent of the characters). However, compared to the 90 ads coded in January 1978, the percent of younger women declined from 32.7 percent to 25.9 percent and the percent of older women increased from 2.3 percent to 3.8 percent.

- The percent of older characters increased from 11 percent in January to 14.1 percent in October.

- In January, two out of three ads for beauty products contained the terms "young" or "youth." In October, only one out of three ads for beauty products contained these terms. It was concluded, therefore, that the percent of ads explicitly selling youth had declined.

- Although "feeling old" (Clairol) and "looking old" (Raintree moisturizer) remain pejorative phrases, the percent of ads using "age" and "aging" as perjorative terms declined from one out of five ads for a beauty product in January to one out of seven in October. The transformation in ad copy can be seen in campaigns such as Noxema's which in October claimed "good skin starts clean and stays healthy looking with Noxema." In January that same ad had claimed that "good skin starts young and stays younger looking with Noxema." Oil of Olay's January ads claimed "I think I look older with dry skin; Oil of Olay makes me look younger." Although the October campaign includes such sentences as "You look so young," the tag does not explicitly venerate youth or villify aging: "So every age can be the best you ever looked."

- The increase in older characters from 11 percent to 14.1 percent reflects awareness that older Americans constitute more than a $60 billion dollar market. The fact also is reflected in ads directed explicitly to the older market. Trailways, for example, advertises senior citizen days, "Senior citizens: you have a choice--Trailways." In the January survey the only products clearly targeted to the older market were denture adhesives and cleaners, arthritis pain remedies and hair dye.

- The January study isolated four commercials which pivoted on the assumption that aging signals decline--two for Jello, one High's ad, one for Country Time Lemonade. In a sample three times as large as the January sample, only one ad was found to be "offensive"--an ad for Orville Redenbacher's popcorn which employs an older female character who repeats Orville's lines and focuses attention on the content he communicates by saying "eh?" The woman is either hard of hearing--in which case the portrayal is ridiculing a physical impairment and is insensitive--or mentally impaired--in which case the ad is stereotypic.

- Although by October ads were beginning to reflect an awareness that aging is relative, older women still do not fare well in televised ads. In the world of the televised ad, 3.8 percent of the characters are older women and 10.3 percent are older men. In the real population, older women outnumber older men.

- As the age of a female character increases, the likelihood that she will advertise a beauty product decreases and the likelihood that she will sell a digestive aid, a laxative, a pain reliever or a denture product increases.

- Older men function more often as authority figures than do older women.

Portrayal of Older Persons in Print Magazine Ads

Older persons also are underrepresented in magazine advertisements. Gantz et al. (1980) analyzed the ads printed in seven popular national magazines with large circulations and found that only 5.9 percent of the 6,785 advertisements coded contained at least one older character. Of the 17,838 people shown in these ads, only 3.1 percent were older adults. Those advertisements which did contain older characters included an average of 2.5 characters. Only 26.7 percent of those advertisements which did contain older characters presented them without their younger counterparts.

Although 75 percent of the older persons who appeared in the ads were men, men were no more likely than women to advertise any specific types of product. Older persons appeared more frequently in advertisements promoting a corporate image rather than a specific consumer product. They also appeared in advertisements for liquor, travel, insurance, recreation, cigarettes and food.

The authors conclude that the underrepresentation of older persons in magazine advertisements may be indicative of the industry's perception that as consumers older persons are comparatively insignificant.

Children's Literature

The academic analysis of children's literature has yielded inconsistent conclusions. After analyzing portrayal of aging in 700 children's picture books, Anselio (1977) reported that "the cumulative effect of the portrayals was to stereotype the older character as unexciting, unimaginative, not self-disclosing, and not self-sufficient." Robin's (1977) more limited survey of 49 children's school books published from 1953 to 1968 and in 1975 found that, although older persons are not likely to appear often, when they do appear it is likely to be in a major role.

Karnes and Peterson (1976) examined the portrayal of older persons in the Newberry Medal winning adolescent literature of the past 53 years and found that:

- 12 percent of all the characters presented in the books were older persons;
- fifty-one books included at least one older character;
- a total of 159 older characters were contained in the books with an average of three older persons per book;
- fifty-nine percent of the older characters were male;
- although occupations were indicated for 60 of the older characters, it was predominantly men who were portrayed as being employed;

- older characters were usually in supporting roles;
- the overall portrayal of the older character's behavior, disposition and appearance was positive.

Methodological Weaknesses in the Research

These data suffer certain inherent weaknesses, however. Most of the studies rely on physical characteristics to identify an elderly character, creating the risk that non-stereotypic elderly characters are underrepresented in the conclusion. All of the academic studies are dated. It takes between one and two years for the typical study to be published. Meanwhile, the content of the media studied may have changed significantly. "Communication is a relatively new field and deals with a phenomenon... so rapidly changing that it is often impossible to get a clean research fix on the data. The theory will almost always lag behind the reality of older people's daily media experience" (Van Dyck, 1981).

In addition, methodological weaknesses in the academic research include small sample size and inadequate weighting procedures. Although larger samples could have been drawn, many of the academic studies are based on small samples which limit the ability to generalize from the data. For example, studies of the viewing behavior of older adults that report data from a survey of 40 to 50 individuals should be viewed with caution. At times the size of the sample may be beyond the control of the research in that there may simply be too few members in the total population to warrant statistically significant generalizations. For example, there are so few older minority characters in prime time programs that the researcher can legitimately report only that older minority characters are underrepresented.

A second problem occurs in analysis of recurring content. Because academic researchers currently assign an equal weight to every commercial regardless of the number of times the commercial is shown, they underweight both the positive and negative commercials that are shown repeatedly and overweight both the positive and negative commercials that are shown infrequently. For example, the Country Time Lemonade commercial criticized by the House Committee on Aging in 1977-78 saturated the airwaves in the summer of 1977 and consequently was a greater cause for concern than a comparable commercial which was aired only one or two times. But very little of the academic research is conducted in a way that makes it possible to identify commercials which are frequently aired.

Similarly, if a stereotyped older person appears in every aired moment of a prime time program, the impact of the portrayal is probably heightened. By segmenting characters into "major" and "minor" or "lead" and "support," academic researchers make a crude distinction between amount of exposure. Additionally, a program which draws a large share of the audience has a greater potential impact than a program which draws a negligible share.

Depending on the size of the audience, the impact of negative portrayal is enhanced or diminished. Unweighted reports of the number of major and minor characters do not reflect these factors.

In general, with the exception of soap operas, the elderly are underrepresented in the mass media. When elderly characters do appear, it is generally true that older male characters will be portrayed more often and more positively than older female characters. This is particularly true in commercials--where older female characters seldom sell beauty aids--and in prime time crime shows in which elderly women are often portrayed as victims. The general portrayal of the elderly in the mass media underestimates their health and overestimates the likelihood that they will be the victims of violent crime. When the elderly do appear in children's literature, magazine ads and prime time, they are more likely than other age groups to exist on the margins of the plot or in large groups of characters. There are some indications, particularly in televised commercials and in magazine advertisements, that the percent of the elderly characters portrayed in the mass media is increasing and that, in general, portrayal of the elderly is becoming more positive. Moreover, portrayal and representation in soap operas remain positive.

Implications

While it is difficult to establish causal relationships between television viewing and any set of attitudes, research supports the hypothesis that those who watch more television are more likely to believe that older persons are ill, poor, sexually inactive, closed-minded and not good at getting things done (Gerbner). Underlying the academic literature on portrayal is the assumption that underrepresentation of any significant group ought to be corrected. Those who favor increased representation of older persons argue that the media ought to provide role models of successful aging. Yet, as advocates of increased portrayal of Blacks learned, one should not assume that increased representation will necessarily be positive. Many who argued for increased portrayal of Blacks on television are dissatisfied with the sort of portrayal that has resulted, particularly in situational comedies (Jamieson, 1980).

Similarly Margaret Mead argued before the House Select Committee on Aging that increased representation of older perons in commercials could be viewed as an evil rather that a good:

> I think we have to consider very seriously whether we want the elderly turned into an exploitable market as children have been, as teenagers have been, and as busy householders have been so that to base any of our appeals on how much the elderly might be fooled into spending on ways of selling youth I think is very questionable (70).

There is some indication that the advertising community in America is increasingly aware of the mature market and understands the continued growth and importance of this segment of the population. But advertisers were "uncharacteristically slow in their response to the over-50 crowd" (Advertising Age, August, 1980). The advertiser thinks primarily in terms of markets and looks for those that can be served profitably, are underdeveloped, are likely to need and want a product or services that he can offer, have the discretionary spending ability to respond to his offerings, and are of sufficient size to allow him to meet his marketing targets (Plant, 1980).

Gradually, advertisers have come to realize that people don't stop needing, wanting and buying things when they reach age 50. But that realization was a long time coming. Probably no market group was more neglected up until 1975 or has had more attention since, than the "maturing" market. Most advertisers have discovered "that Americans over 50 are a prime market for existing goods and services with enough purchasing power to merit the development of new products designed especially for them" (Advertising Age, 1980).

A survey of leading advertising agencies and advertisers indicated that numerous studies have been conducted and every large agency already has set up a task force to study the 1980 census data in great detail. Plant (1980) reported that a major new project will examine older people's attitudes and perceptions about commercials using older performers to sell products to the older market.

Advertisers are stimulated by the market potential--$60 billion--and the older market is now looked at in terms of "situation" rather than years. Advertisers cite such factors as health, work situation, interests, motivation, desires, financial position with special attention to disposable income, time, geography, education, marital status, life style including type of domicile, habits concerning media, existence or nonexistence of watershed changes, and so forth. Older persons are further categorized as active retired, active affluent, home-makers, disadvantaged and indigent.

Despite the increased attention being paid to the mature market, pejorative uses of "age" and "aging" in ads indicate that advertisers still may not be sufficiently sensitive to the feelings of older Americans. According to Advertising Age, some experts say agencies can help themselves by hiring older copywriters and executives who are experienced in the business and who understand about getting old.

Age Discrimination in Employment

Although the issue of age discrimination in employment is within the province of another technical committee, it should be noted here that underrepresentation of older persons in televised pro-

gramming and commercials means that older persons are less likely to be employed on the air. Here age, race and sex discrimination interact to make it less likely that older females will be employed than older males and least likely that older black females will be employed. The Gray Panthers see a similar pattern in network news. Lydia Bragger (1980), head of the Gray Panther Media Watch, notes there are "male newscasters with wrinkles and white hair who are considered distinguished looking" but no women with wrinkles and white hair broadcasting the news.

KEY ISSUES

The committee identified the following issues related to media portrayal of older persons:

ISSUE: Do the mass media have a role in interpreting the impact on society of the changes in the size of the older population and in disseminating information that would reduce the stigma against older persons?

ISSUE: To what extent are the media responsible for disseminating to the general public factual information about the physical, physiological, cognitive and functional changes which occur as a part of the normal aging process?

ISSUE: Should television programming have a role in fostering positive relationships between older persons and individuals in other age groups?

ISSUE: What are the effects if any on the viewers of underrepresentation and stereotyping of older persons including women, minorities, the rural and poor aged?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establishment of a National Council for Mass Media and Older Persons

Recognizing the need to (1) improve the quality of older persons' lives in their media environment, (2) enhance their sense of self worth and self esteem by working for programming and publications which raise the public consciousness and create awareness of aging issues, and deal with normal issues of aging in a realistic, balanced and sensitive way, the committee recommends that a National Council for Mass Media and Older Persons be established for a 10-year period to promote research on media portrayal and program activity; explore developments in media industries; promote access to emerging technologies and establish priorities for their use; and promote advocacy efforts in media of assistance to older Americans.

The Council also would undertake regular publication of a magazine that would serve as an outlet for researchers and would be circulated to advertisers, producers, broadcasters, journalists, writers, directors, program executives, marketing and academic researchers and aging advocates.

2. Research on Media and Aging

Sociological studies of the mass media usually focus on one of three related problems: on the processes by which mediated messages are generated or on the diffusion of information through a population, and its impact on individuals, groups, or the society as a whole (Johnstone, et al., 1976). Early academic literature on media and aging was grounded in stereotypic assumptions about the level of activity and abilities of older adults. For example, older people are sedentary, have fewer ties to the world, and more leisure time (Meyersohn, 1961). Although such stereotypic assumptions rarely appear in the empirical studies of the 1980s researchers still have not come to grips with the problems in identifying stereotypes. The criteria used by researchers to identify an older character do not yet reflect the complex, variable and relative nature of the aging process (Jamieson, 1980). Therefore, the committee recommends that research be encouraged on the complex process by which mediated and nonmediated information creates our sense of what it is to age and our attitudes toward aging, and that studies of the mass media and women and/or minorities include "age" as a variable and the criteria used to determine the "age" of a televised or print character be analyzed.

Because certain media had not been subjected to empirical study, the committee recommends that the Administration on Aging, the National Institute on Aging, and the Department of Education encourage research on portrayal of older Americans in:

- °TV News
- °Public broadcasting
- °Documentaries
- °Game shows
- °Talk shows
- °Most children's programming
- °Radio
- °Cable televison
- °Specialized journals
- °Textbooks
- °Films
- °Newspapers

3. Current research on portrayal of older persons in media does not effectively distinguish between frequently and infrequently aired commercials, or between programs with a high audience share and those with a low audience share. Therefore the committee recommends (a) that some type of exposure measure or means of reflecting Gross Ratings Points and audience share be used in validating

conclusions about the stereotypic portrayal of older persons; (b) that a mechanism be established for monitoring commercials and indicating those that are stereotypic.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

This country is in the midst of a new industrial revolution which has encroached upon our day-to-day lives so quickly and with so little fanfare that the American public may not be aware of its potential impact. This revolution, brought about by the rapid advances in communications and computer technology, has the capacity to transform the way we work, travel, gain information, and use our leisure. It can help us cope with the rising costs and declining supplies of energy.

"Some believe that the energy crisis will force many people to cut back their traveling habits. And with more time being spent at home, the demand for products that can occupy time is likely to increase. Communication experts believe that families will become more eager to experiment with television innovations because of the increasing tendency for individuals to find entertainment that does not require leaving home" (The Futures Group, November, 1980).

Evidence of the telecommunications revolution is everywhere--pocket calculators that perform complex computations and cost under $50, video games that are the precursors of the home computer, videotape recorders, video disc players and "electronic" newspapers. There has been a sharp rise in video game sales from 2.1 million in 1978 to 4.6 million in 1979, or an increase of more than 170 percent.

VTR's and Video Discs

The new telecommunications technology has modified home entertainment. Videotape recorders (VTR) and video disc players enable the consumer to record and/or store programs for later consumption, enabling the viewer to select a convenient viewing time and consequently a wider variety of programming. Sales of VRTs and video disc players have been brisk. "The principal obstacle to consumer acceptance of the innovative electronic entertainment products has been cost. Consumers are receiving more sophisticated electronics for their dollar now than ever before, but prices for the innovative devices are still quite high. Large screen TVs, VTRs, and video disc players, as well as the high quality stereo systems were all priced in excess of $800 in 1979" (Futures, 1980).

Many researchers advocate delivery of social services through the use of the new telecommunications technology (Marron, 1980), especially cable television which is becoming more readily available to consumers.

Cable

Cable was first introduced in rural America in 1948 either to facilitate the receipt of broadcast signals, to improve the picture quality, or to add more television programming. "Cable television has been around for decades, but it is now entering a period of rapid growth which can be attributed to an easing of federal regulations and the transformation of the cable system from a simple community antenna service to a total telecommunication service (Shooshan, 1980).

Cable switched from the rural to the metropolitan market and competition for the lucrative franchises became intense, with corporate giants scrambling for a piece of the action. Business Week (December, 1980) reports that in 1978 the cable television industry's revenues exceeded $1.5 billion. Currently there are 4,200 cable franchise systems in this country, and more than 18 million homes, or nearly 24 percent of those with a television set, have cable television. The franchise permits a cable company to wire a community. It is issued by the local municipality, which can tax cable operators up to 3 percent of gross revenues and up to 5 percent of basic user fees under Federal Communication Commission regulations. Once the franchise is awarded, cable companies must spend huge sums to wire the homes. This year the cable industry plans to spend an estimated $1 billion wiring the nation.

The experts estimate that CATV will reach 50 million homes by 1990. Currently, cable operators can select from 94 services. Clearly this will present unprecedented opportunities to older Americans, particularly if they demand channels geared specifically to their requirements and interests prior to the issuance of franchises. Older Americans will find that cable television provides opportunities for new uses of their time as well as services.

Although cable offers a variety of services, some advocates fear that the cost of these new services could be prohibitive to older persons, especially the indigent aged.

The consumer pays a one-time installation charge and monthly fee for the basic service. Subscriber rates are set for about four years under the franchise agreement and can run as high as $25 a month for basic cable service. Installation of the channel selector box which is attached to the television set in the home costs anywhere from $15 to $25. The consumer must pay more for additional services such as movies which cost an extra $8 to $10 per month. Cable comes in a series of tiers. The basic service runs approximately $4.50 per month, sometimes as little as $2.50 a month and the middle tier is $7.50 to $8.75 a month for 13 channels (Jordan, 1980).

Some industry officials argue that the cost for cable programs is not expensive when one looks at the rising cost of energy. "The more the cost of gasoline rises, the more TV viewers there will

be.. when compared with the price of movie tickets, babysitters and parking, $15 a month for cable programming isn't much to pay for home entertainment" (Futures, 1980).

One of the unique features of cable television is that, by increasing the number of channels, it permits narrowcasting programming that addresses a specific message to a limited but specific audience. Researchers have found that cable television is an efficient means of bringing information to older persons. Moreover, it can be used to produce public access programs which could maximize outreach efforts. Access channels increasingly will permit nonprofit groups and individual citizens to produce programs by providing color production equipment, facilities, training, and other support systems. In time older Americans across the country will be able to design, produce, and appear in their own shows on a continuing and regular basis.

Cable television projects that have demonstrated the value of cable for the older person include:

(1) A bidirectional cable television system in an East Harlem public housing project for the elderly (Gaylord White). Mobile equipment installed in a small basement studio enabled the project staff to cable cast from any area within the building complex. The program was designed to alleviate feelings of psychosocial isolation and to increase the tenant's knowledge of available health care and social services (Marron, 1980).

(2) Reading (Pa.) Cable TV project located in a homogenous community. This two-way interactive cable television system connected three neighborhood community centers and later expanded to include city hall, the city courthouse, social security office and high schools. It was found that the effects of the two-way cable programming helped the elderly make or renew friendships, reduced isolation and served as a source of human contact. It also helped the elderly participate in discussions elsewhere and promoted increased awareness among participants of community problems and the availability of social services.

(3) Public Access Cable by and for Elders (PACE) originated in a large heterogenous urban setting which has one of the largest concentrations of older adults in the nation. PACE, in San Diego, is served by the largest single cable TV company in America. This one-way prerecorded public transmission system provided more intensive training in the production of cable programming for the elderly.

(4) Educational TV Center of the Archdiocese of San Francisco offered television broadcasting, teleconferencing and color production facilities to Bay Area senior citizens to promote establishment of a Bay Area Senior Citizens Communication Network.

Interactive Cable

Another notable experiment that can be adapted to the needs of the elder adult is QUBE, the nation's first two-way (Interactive) cable system operated by Warner Amex in Columbus, Ohio. In addition to providing television shows and data, QUBE allows the viewer to register opinions, select guests, choose books to read with the home Book Club, express thought about government actions and participate in game shows via a control box attached to the television set. "With the presence of the five interactive buttons viewers can control the programming... the most important feature of the interactive is that it is designed for everyone to use it..." (Jordan, 1980).

Industry analysts are still trying to figure out which interactive services will attract consumers. Meanwhile, less than one percent of the cable systems are interactive today because most of the older cable systems have only a 12-channel capacity and cannot accommodate the interactive system. Experts believe that the interactive system will be in eight million homes by the late 1980's.

Cable and Computer Technology

At the same time that interactive systems are offering innovations, the link-up between cable and computer technology will offer dramatic changes in many areas of life for Americans, particularly older Americans. Here are some of the areas:

1. News Dissemination. Types of information currently offered Americans through their newspapers are expected to be brought into the home through cable and computer technology. Cable systems are experimenting with the delivery of the electronic text into the home and the day of the "electronic newspaper" may not be far away. There already are a few experimental models.

   "The first major experiment in the U.S. on the electronic newspaper was instituted July 1980 when the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch began transmitting its entire editorial content to 3000 home terminals around the country on a computer system called CompuServe" (Futures, 1980,). Another experimental program is underway in Coral Gables (Florida) where the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain and the Bell Telephone system are providing news, advertising and other consumer services to 200 personal computers installed in area homes at no cost to participants. Knight-Ridder provides the computer and content and Bell provides the terminals.

2. Information Dissemination. Older Americans seeking information for enjoyment, study, or any other purpose will have access to an infinite variety of sources of infor-

mation. For example, if one embarked on a study of the Industrial Revolution, he or she could get a raft of information by simply pushing a button. Similarly, information on the Meals on Wheels program could be called up.

3. Education. The educational possibilities in cable are vast, all the way up to obtaining a college degree. But courses are also visualized in such diverse areas as cooking, learning to play a musical instrument, pursuing hobbies, how-to, home repair, and so on.

4. Personal Security. Older Americans, especially vulnerable to crimes against the person, can be protected by systems that will monitor the home for assaults, burglaries, fires, and other life-threatening emergencies.

   More and more cable systems are including home security services in their franchise bids. Some of the experimental systems include:

   a. Personal Alarm Security System--a crime prevention technique for older persons that is being tested in New York.

   b. Lifeline, a personal security system developed in 1972 to meet the needs of the elderly and disabled. Under this system, hospitals, other health institutions and social service agencies in some 50 communities in 16 states are linked electronically with people around the clock.

   c. Companion Service, an innovation for use in the homes of the frail or handicapped elderly, automatically alerts a communication center when help is needed. Sensors detect an interruption in a person's normal activities and trigger the dialing of the telephone.

   d. Silent Communications Alarm Network is a personal security system developed for use in homes for the aged or handicapped to indicate a medical emergency.

5. Health Care. Cable is expected to bring better care to older Americans through the use of interactive systems that will permit them to be treated by clinics with needed diagnosis and other information. Health monitoring features allow direct contact with hospitals should the patient develop a health problem while at home.

   "Many of the more innovative cable companies are actually developing 'telemedicine' capabilities which will interconnect hospitals, clinics, and even homes for limited diagnostic purposes" (Shooshan, 1980). Older Americans

in particular can benefit from medical alert devices which can be activated whenever an emergency occurs. These medallion type devices, whch can be worn as jewelry or carried in a pocket, are designed with a button which when pressed during an emergency sets off an alarm that will bring assistance. "The elderly persons for whom a fall is a serious threat don't have to worry about being able to get to the phone. This device can set off the alarm up to 150 feet from the basic alert unit" (Jordan, 1980).

6. Transportation. Older Americans, particularly the rural aged, currently find access to transportation difficult if not impossible; as a consequence, making even simple trips to the supermarket or the bank are burdensome chores. Such trips may be unnecessary as these services are brought into the home.

7. Consumer Services. Shopping at home will be made so simple that infirm older Americans need never leave home. Products and services will be flashed on home TV screens and shopping can be accomplished by telephone.

8. Financial Management. Similarly, older Americans who are infirm often are forced to rely on others to handle such important and personal matters as cashing the monthly Social Security check and managing a savings or investment portfolio. Cable permits at-home management of finances, with electronic fund transfer already a reality and the phone an easy device to double-check transactions.

ADVANTAGES OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Experts indicate that the new telecommunications technology has the potential for improving the quality of life for the nation's 24 million older Americans. This technology will create new opportunities for solving the problems of older persons, such as lack of transportation, inadequate and costly health care services, vulnerability to crime, isolation from society, inadequate income, and lack of access to information.

Moreover, the use of a two-way communication system would help administrative agencies provide governmental services to the general public. For example, a two-way system could be used to expedite administrative conferences involving claimants to government benefit programs by eliminating the necessity for the claimant to make a personal appearance. "In an era when communication plays an increasingly important role in public policy making, cable technology provides local individuals and groups with a means of electronic communication and input into community affairs. By strengthening citizen access to and control over information, cable television enhances the ability of citizens to communicate with public officials and to participate effectively in urban political processes" (Moss, 1978).

PROBLEMS

Barrier to Access: The Problem for the Elder Poor.

One of the implications underlying these exciting trends in new technology is the need for older adults and their advocates to deliberate on ways to influence the system so that inability to pay will not be a barrier.

Invasion of Privacy: A Potential Problem

The two-way interactive cable systems are "Orwellion" in nature and portend the possibility of abuses of the privacy of citizens. Cable operators will have access to a wealth of private information about individuals which could be used fraudulently by persons who might get a hold of it, or could result in abuses such as blackmail against older persons in particular and others who are vulnerable. Moreover some theorists suggest that the sophisticated information systems reinforce the power of the state and threaten the privacy of individuals (Moss, 1978).

Another Problem: Acquiring Literacy in the Language of the New Technology

Children are currently being taught to be fluent in the language of new technology. There is no reason to assume that given proper training, adults of all ages cannot learn to use the new informational systems.

KEY ISSUES

ISSUE: Will older Americans living on fixed incomes and the poor aged be able to afford the services available through the new media technology?

ISSUE: What is being done about underwriting the cost to the public and to older persons whose incomes are limited?

ISSUE: What options are open to the indigent older person in terms of the new communications technology?

ISSUE: How can the elderly become literate about the new technology?

ISSUE: What would be the impact on older persons of the transition to telecommunications technology that would allow them to acquire information and transact routine business without leaving their homes?

ISSUE: In looking at the utilization of telecommunications technology, what are the implications for the possibility of abuses of the privacy of older citizens?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The explosion in the cable communications field presents the potential for increased opportunities for programming directed toward the needs of older Americans in entertainment, news and information. The new technology also offers the potential for innovative services that can help solve problems faced by older Americans.

The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. that those engaged in funding and administering programs for older persons--both government and private--systematically examine telecommunications technology as a tool for providing information and services;

2. that a clearinghouse be established for information on telecommunications technology so that older persons can petition for access to new services at affordable rates;

3. that older persons and their advocates become involved in the franchising process beginning with the drafting of the cable ordinance, indicating the types of services and protections that are important to them and seeking commitments from individuals awarded cable franchises;

4. that public and private sources of funding provide financing for the education and training of older persons in the skills needed to make efficient use of the new technology;

5. to minimize the likelihood that the new technology will isolate the elderly, we recommend that public and private agencies encourage providers of the new technology to link senior centers to nursing homes, adult day centers, apartment complexes for older persons and facilitate social interaction among older persons;

6. that studies be done to determine the impact, if any, of the new technology on those older persons who do and do not subscribe to them (e.g., do computer based informational systems in the home affect social interaction?).

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1981 White House Conference on Aging Act (P.L. 95-478 Title II)

GPO 885-072

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Retirement Income
Health Maintenance and Health Promotion
Health Services
Social and Health Aspects of Long Term Care
Family, Social Services and Other Support Systems
The Physical and Social Environment and Quality of Life
Older Americans as A Growing National Resource
Employment
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Societal Institutions
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Economy
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Educational Systems
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Spiritual Well-Being
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Family
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Media
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Governmental Structures
Research in Aging

Experts from various fields were appointed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to serve on 16 Technical Committees, each charged with developing issues and recommendations in a particular area for consideration as background material for the delegates to the 1981 White House Conference on Aging.

the 1981 White House Conference on Aging

Executive Summary of Technical Committee on CREATING AN AGE INTEGRATED SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

TCES-16

NOTE: The recommendations of this document are not recommendations of the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, or the Department of Health and Human Services. This document was prepared for the consideration of the Conference delegates. The delegates will develop their recommendations through the processes of their national meeting in late 1981.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, D.D., Director
National Interreligious Affairs
American Jewish Committee

Lydia Bragger, Chairperson
Gray Panther National Media Watch
Task Force

Bertha Brown, MA, Executive Director
Our Neighborhood Civic Association &
School - Community Program
Philadelphia, PA

Nancy Hanks, A.B.
Former Chairperson of the National
Endowment for the Arts
Former Chairperson of the National
Council on the Arts
Active board member at Duke
University/Center on Aging

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Art
University of Maryland

Jules Power, Senior Producer
Overeasy, Public Broadcasting
Service

Nancy K. Schlossberg, Ed.D.
Expert - Midlife Transition
and Counteracting Stereotypes

Jackie Sunderland, Director
National Center on Arts and
Aging
National Council on Aging

COMMITTEE STAFF, CONSULTANTS, EXPERTS

Morton Yarmon, Consultant
Director, Public Relations
American Jewish Committee, NYC

Marlene L. Johnson
White House Conference on Aging Staff

Stan Cooper
White House Conference on Aging Staff

INTRODUCTION

The relationship of the older American to the new media culture of our society--as subject, participant, and consumer--is one of the central, critical issues confronting the 1981 White House Conference on Aging.

Mass media have become "the heart of the folk culture of America on which ordinary people everywhere lean" (Boorstin, 1974). On an average evening, an estimated 90 million Americans watch television as their primary medium for information and entertainment. In this country, over 98 percent of all homes have television sets and Americans--especially the very young, the old and the poor--tune in to about six hours a day or approximately 2,200 hours a year. Older persons are the primary consumers of television. A national survey found that the typical older adult consumes approximately four to seven more hours of television each week than does the average viewer (Marron, 1980).

"We are perhaps the first people in history," Boorstin observes, "to have centrally organized, mass-produced folk culture." That popular culture comes to us from enormous, centralized, self-consciously creative organizations of advertising agencies, newspapers, radio and TV networks, outdoor advertising agencies, large circulation magazines, a profusion of hardcover and paperback books, and so on.

These media--in particular, advertising, television programming and the exploding new media technologies--play and will play a decisive role in forming and establishing the values, the ideals, the needs, the cultural heroes and anti-heroes, and the images that Americans in all segments, racial, religious ethnic, and gender groups hold about one another.

The U.S. Congress clearly recognized the dangers of age stereotypes which it sees as "prevalent throughout the Nation." In enabling legislation for the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, Congress mandated that a policy be developed to overcome such stereotypes. (P.L. 95-478)

Toward that end a technical committee was established to explore personal and societal implications for the media in an intergenerational context. Media and aging was one of seven areas examined under the rubric "Creating an Age-Integrated Society," a conception that implies both short-and long-term perspectives.

The Technical Committee on Mass Media convened four all-day sessions between July, 1980 and January, 1981. Two subcommittees were formed and charged with preparing background information for the committee's deliberations, which centered on these major themes:

- the influence of the mass media in forming and perpetuating cultural values and role models;

- the influence of the media in changing society's values by fostering contructive relationships between older persons and other age groups;

- the role of older people as consumers of the media;

- the role of older persons as participants in producing the educational and informational programming and entertainment content in the media;

- and the impact of new media technologies on the lives of older persons.

In seeking to analyze society's perception about older persons, the committee directed the Subcommittee on Stereotypes to conduct a survey of existing literature on the portrayal of older persons in the mass media. The resulting background paper, "Stereotyping of the Elderly in the Mass Media: A Review of the Literature," by Kathleen Jamieson and Theresa Marron was the centerpiece of the committee's exploration of the implications for a national policy to eliminate age stereotypes. The committee's analysis of the state of the art also was based on a report by Lydia Bragger entitled "Age Stereotyping and the Media" and a search of gerontology journals by Jacqueline Sunderland.

The committee examined the image of older Americans in the mass media as indicated by the survey and identified several areas that have been largely overlooked--radio, song lyrics, television game shows, news coverage, children's cartoons, documentaries, newspapers and so on. A cadre of media executives* representing

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*John Canon, President, National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

Dr. Gary Jordan, Warner Amex Cable Communications

Rosalind I. Liberman, Corporate Support Associate, Equitable Life Assurance

Alfred Plant, Tresurer, National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

Herbert Schlosser, Radio Corporation of America (RCA)

James Sheffield, Population Resource Center

Harry Shooshan, Former Chief, House Commerce Communications Subcommittee

Gene Swanzy, Public Broadcasting Service

Nicholas VanDyck, National Council for Children and Television

Beverly Vinson, Director of Programming, Public Broadcasting System

television, print, advertising, marketing and research met with the committee to examine the role of mass media in establishing constructive images of older persons and understanding the needs of the aging population of this country. The portrayal of older women and the minority aged, who are underrepresented in most forms of media portrayal, received special attention as the committee discussed what the media could do to help change society's negative attitudes towards aging.

The Subcommittee on New Media Technology prepared a brief background paper entitled "Cable Television Programs for Older Adults" (Marron, 1980). Subsequently, experts on new media technology were called in to present to the committee up-to-date information on the telecommunications industry.

The committee invested considerable time examining the issues of aging as they pertain to the electronic media, because television is a fixture in most American homes and its impact is pervasive.

MEDIA AND AGING: MAJOR FINDINGS

In general, with the exception of soap operas, the elderly are underrepresented in the mass media. When elderly characters do appear, it is generally true that older male characters will be portrayed more often and more positively than older female characters. This is particularly true in commercials--where older female characters seldom sell beauty aid--and in prime time crime shows in which elderly women are often portrayed as victims. The general portrayal of the elderly in the mass media underestimates their health and overestimates the likelihood that they will be the victims of violent crime. When the elderly do appear in children's literature, magazine ads and prime time, they are more likely than other age groups to exist on the margins of the plot or in large groups of characters. There are some indications, particularly in televised commercials and in magazine advertisements, that the percent of the elderly characters portrayed in the mass media is increasing and that, in general, portrayal of the elderly is becoming more positive. Moreover, portrayal and representation in soap operas remain positive.

KEY ISSUES

The committee identified the following issues related to media portrayal of older persons:

ISSUE: Do the mass media have a role in interpreting the impact on society of the changes in the size of the older population and in disseminating information that would reduce the stigma against older persons?

ISSUE: To what extent are the media responsible for disseminating to the general public factual information about the physical, physiological, cognitive and functional changes which occur as a part of the normal aging process?

ISSUE: Should television programming have a role in fostering positive relationships between older persons and individuals in other age groups?

ISSUE: What are the effects if any on the viewers of underrepresentation and stereotyping of older persons including women, minorities, the rural and poor aged?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establishment of a National Council for Mass Media and Older Persons

Recognizing the need to (1) improve the quality of older persons' lives in their media environment, (2) enhance their sense of self worth and self esteem by working for programming and publications which raise the public consciousness and create awareness of aging issues, and deal with normal issues of aging in a realistic, balanced and sensitive way, the committee recommends that a National Council for Mass Media and Older Persons be established for a 10-year period to promote research on media portrayal and program activity; explore developments in media industries; promote access to emerging technologies and establish priorities for their use; and promote advocacy efforts in media of assistance to older Americans.

The Council also would undertake regular publication of a magazine that would serve as an outlet for researchers and would be circulated to advertisers, producers, broadcasters, journalists, writers, directors, program executives, marketing and academic researchers and aging advocates.

2. Research on Media and Aging

Sociological studies of the mass media usually focus on one of three related problems: on the processes by which mediated messages are generated; or on the diffusion of information through a population, and its impact on individuals, groups, or the society as a whole.(Johnstone, et al., 1976). Early academic literature on media and aging was grounded in stereotypic assumptions about the level of activity and abilities of older adults. For example, older people are sedentary, have fewer ties to the world, and more leisure time. (Meyersohn, 1961). Although such stereotypic assumptions rarely appear in the empirical studies of the 1980's, researchers still have not come to grips with the problems in identifying stereotypes. The criteria used by researchers to identify an older character do not yet reflect the complex, variable and relative nature of the aging process. (Jamieson,

1980). Therefore, the Committee recommends that research be encouraged on the complex process by which mediated and nonmediated information creates our sense of what it is to age and our attitudes toward aging, and that studies of the mass media and women and/or minorities include "age" as a variable and the criteria used to determine the "age" of a televised or print character be analyzed.

Because certain media had not been subjected to empirical study, the committee recommends that the Administration on Aging, the National Institute on Aging, and the Department of Education encourage research on portrayal of older Americans in:

- TV News
- Public broadcasting
- Documentaries
- Game shows
- Talk shows
- Most children's programming
- Radio
- Cable television
- Specialized journals
- Textbooks
- Films
- Newspapers

3. Current research on portrayal of older persons in media does not effectively distinguish between frequently and infrequently aired commercials, or between programs with a high audience share and those with a low audience share. Therefore the committee recommends (a) that some type of exposure measure or means of reflecting Gross Ratings Points and audience share, be used in validating conclusions about the stereotypic portrayal of older persons; (b) that a mechanism be established for monitoring commercials and indicating those that are stereotypic.

NEW TECHNOLOGY: MAJOR FINDINGS

A telecommunications revolution is taking place in America, with the potential to transform the way citizens work, travel, gain information, and use their leisure time. Cable television, in particular, has the capacity to improve the quality of life for the nation's 24 million older Americans. First introduced in America in 1948, cable television is now entering a period of rapid growth. Currently, there are 4,200 cable franchise systems in this country, and more than 18 million homes, or nearly 24 percent of those with a television set, have cable television. Experts predict that CATV will reach 50 million homes by 1990.

One of the unique features of cable television is that it permits programming which addresses a specific audience. It can be used to produce public access programs which could maximize outreach efforts and serve as a means of social facilitation. Innovative and successful cable television projects designed for older adults are already operating in several cities. Among these is the nation's first two-way (interactive) cable system in Columbus, Ohio, through which viewers can register opinions, select guests for

shows, choose books to read with the Home Book Club, express thought about government actions, and participate in game shows via a control box attached to the television set.

In the future, such two-way communications systems could help administrative agencies provide governmental services to the general public. For example, a two-way system could be used to expedite administrative conferences involving claimants to government benefits by eliminating the necessity for a claimant to make a personal appearance.

The link-up between cable and computer technology can also offer dramatic changes in the lives of older Americans, particularly in the areas of news dissemination, information dissemination, education, personal security, health care, transporation, consumer services, and financial management.

Although cable offers a variety of services, some advocates fear that the cost of these new services could be prohibitive to older persons, especially the indigent aged. Older adults and their advocates will need to deliberate on ways to influence the system so that inability to pay will not be a barrier. In addition, two-way interactive systems will need to be monitored to ensure that they do not violate the privacy of citizens.

KEY ISSUES:

ISSUE: Will older Americans living on fixed incomes and the poor aged be able to afford the services available through the new media technology?

ISSUE: What is being done about underwriting the cost to the public and to older persons whose incomes are limited?

ISSUE: What options are open to the indigent older person in terms of the new communications technology?

ISSUE: How can the elderly become literate about the new technology?

ISSUE: What would be the impact on older persons of the transition to telecommunications technology that would allow them to acquire information and transact routine business without leaving their homes?

ISSUE: In looking at the utilization of telecommunications technology, what are the implications for the possibility of abuses of the privacy of older citizens?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The explosion in the cable communications field presents the potential for increased opportunities for programming directed

toward the needs of older Americans in entertainment, news and information. The new technology also offers the potential for innovative services that can help solve problems faced by older Americans.

The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. that those engaged in funding and administering programs for older persons--both government and private--systematically examine telecommunications technology as a tool for providing information and services;

2. that a clearinghouse be established for information on telecommunications technology so that older persons can petition for access to new services at affordable rates;

3. that older persons and their advocates become involved in the franchising process beginning with the drafting of the cable ordinance.

GPO 885-071

The following Technical Committee Summaries have been published:

Retirement Income
Health Maintenance and Health Promotion
Health Services
Social and Health Aspects of Long Term Care
Family, Social Services and Other Support Systems
The Physical and Social Environment and Quality of Life
Older Americans as A Growing National Resource
Employment
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Societal Institutions
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Economy
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Educational Systems
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Spiritual Well-Being
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Family
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for the Media
Creating an Age Integrated Society: Implications for Governmental Structures
Research in Aging

Experts from various fields were appointed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to serve on 16 Technical Committees, each charged with developing issues and recommendations in a particular area for consideration as background material for the delegates to the 1981 White House Conference on Aging.